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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000336

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SUBJECT: FAMILY PAYS TO FREE TORTURED JOURNALIST

REF: CONAKRY 00000309

¶1. Summary: On June 8 the PAO and press assistant met with Moise Sidibe, the Guinean journalist who was detained and tortured for more than a week by the CNDD (Reftel). Sidibe described the events of the night of May 27 when he, his son and brother were arrested by a unit of the Ministry of Special Services, Anti-Drug and Grand Banditry, and held in custody at Camp Alpha Yaya. Sidibe's family paid 4 million GNF (\$800) for his and his brother's release. End summary.

¶2. According to Sidibe, the gendarmes entered his neighborhood and began arresting people the night of May 27-28. He said they particularly targeted foreigners and ex-pats, such as Lebanese and Pakistanis. Sidibe himself is Vietnamese by birth. (His adoptive Guinean father was in the French army during the French-Indochina war in the 1950s and brought Sidibe and his mother back to Guinea in 1961.)

¶3. According to Sidibe, the gendarmes initially claimed that those that were being rounded up were suspected of drug-dealing. Sidibe firmly denies that he had anything to do with the drug trade and stated that the gendarmes planted evidence of drugs at the motel-bar, owned by his wife, where he was arrested. He said that after being taken into custody the gendarmes immediately began demanding money from him and the other detainees in exchange for their release. He said that some of the other detainees paid large sums of money in order to secure their freedom.

¶4. Sidibe claims that the gendarmes holding him initially demanded 250 million GNF from him (about \$50,000). Sidibe refused to pay. The captors then lowered their demand to 50 million GNF. He said that the next day they began beating him with strips made from car tires as well as a metal pipe. They shaved off part of his hair. Sidibe said that the gendarmes never spoke about the critical articles that he wrote in his newspaper, L'Independant. He told the gendarmes that he was a journalist but they did not believe him.

¶5. As gendarmes submitted Sidibe to taunts and abuse, the U.S. Embassy increased its efforts to press the government to either free him from detention or formally bring charges against him. On June 4, PAO met with the president of the Conseil National de la Communication, Jean Raymond Soumah, to express concern for Sidibe. Soumah said that he and the Minister of Information and Culture, Justin Morel Junior, met with a group of journalists who spoke to them about Sidibe's situation. The two promised to do what they could.

¶6. Soumah spoke to the editor of l'Independant in the PAO's presence to find out Sidibe's status and also spoke to one of Sidibe's close friends who was in contact with Sidibe. Soumah obtained the cell phone number of the cell mate of Sidibe. PAO managed to speak to Sidibe for a few seconds, just long enough to confirm that he had been beaten and tortured. Sidibe later told PAO that phones were contraband but the phone had been smuggled in by a fellow prisoner.

¶7. The next day, June 5, Sidibe had still not been released. PAO

met with the Minister of Information and Culture to again express the concerns of the Embassy. The Minister had to rush to a meeting with the Prime Minister but promised to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense. He said if Sidibe still were not released he would speak directly with the president of the CNDD, Dadis Camara. Later that day the Embassy issued a press statement expressing deep concern over the treatment of Sidibe. Sidibe was released two hours later. Sidibe said that his family paid approximately 4 million GNF (\$800) to release him and his brother. Sidibe's son had been released earlier in the week.

18. Sidibe described the detention facility at Camp Alpha Yaya as being extremely crowded. He said that the ex-pats paid several million GNF for their release as did some of the other prisoners. He also noted that he spoke with the body guards of two Generals from the Conte regime, Diara Camara and Ali Daffe, and was told the Generals were being held on the second floor. Sidibe, who describes himself as a teacher as well as a journalist, also said the facility was filled to overflowing with students. They were accused of throwing rocks at the vehicles of the CNDD during a demonstration in the Bambeto area. Sidibe said that the only condition for their release was the payment of cash by their families to their captors.

19. Comment: It is not clear whether Sidibe's outspoken articles criticizing the government had anything to do with his arrest. It appears more probable that his arrest and detentions were the result of an effort by the CNDD to shake people down in his neighborhood. As Sidibe's family paid for his release we may never know whether or not the Embassy's efforts would have been effective on their own. However, it is clear that the Guinean government was aware at the highest levels of the Embassy's concern. Sidibe himself said that

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he was greatly encouraged when he heard that the Embassy was making inquiries on his behalf. As long as families continue to pay large sums of money for their detained loved ones, these arrests will continue to provide a steady stream of income. It is unclear whether these revenues are going into government coffers or private pockets, or both. End comment.
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